

# *Connotation gaps in adjectives 'warm,' 'hot,' 'cool' and 'cold' between English and Japanese*

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## **1. Introduction**

In translating between English and Japanese, applying every word into the ones that approximately match seems very simple. However, it does not necessarily mean that what is said is carried exactly what is meant. When the word is defined simply over into few meanings, none of them is not even an exact equivalent in the other language, the translation is not successfully carried, rather it causes a gap in meaning. Thus, the gap between two different languages needs to be made aware in translation, in order to make more precise the meaning.

In this paper, four adjectives, 'warm,' 'hot,' 'cool,' and 'cold' are examined in English and Japanese. These adjectives are frequently used as modifiers and predicates, both of which give a description of certain situations and items. Because of the frequent use, the application of the word can be restricted in situations in either or both languages. How the contrast of the word can best fit to what situation and types of idiomatic expressions would best demonstrate the underlying meanings, and the gap will be compared in both languages in order to provide wider range of usage and new meanings to be considered in expressions.

## 2. Dictionary definitions

### (a) Common entries of 'warm,' 'hot,' 'cool,' and 'cold' regarding Temperature

In four English-English dictionaries, the definition of 'warm' commonly illustrates its moderate temperature. None of the definitions I looked up has any restriction over the range of degrees in measurement. Because physical perception depends on subjective criteria as additional and supportive information, most all dictionary definitions for native speakers of both languages give a tinge of average temperature based on an impersonal perceptual with its comfortability and pleasantness.

As well as the definition of 'warm,' none of the dictionaries provides its explicit temperature of describing the word 'hot.' However, most of the definitions provide a clear contrast to the word 'warm,' saying that a certain degree of high heat and temperature defines the term. This clearly shows irritation beyond the mild heat found in 'warm.'

As for the definitions of 'cool,' most of the dictionaries provide the same illustration as that of moderate coldness. In addition to a commonly stated definition of "neither warm nor very cold," a few dictionaries provide a vital connotation of refreshing and pleasant coldness. In Japanese, these two definitions are not found in the word 'cool.'

In contrast, the definition of 'cold' is illustrated as that of low and lower temperature than usual human physical temperature. Although the antonym is introduced as 'hot,' the comparative description of cold is, not 'warm,' is added to give approximation depending on the context given.

In English-English dictionaries, these four adjectives 'warm,' 'hot,' 'cool,' and 'cold' do not provide any clear degree in measurement. Instead,

all the given definitions regarding temperature illustrate the ambiguous degrees based on human body temperature even if it differs from person to person. Moreover, this biased temperature gives the underlying aspect of refreshingness and comfortability towards human perception.

### **(b) Differences in Connotation**

Comparing the definitions of these adjectives to the ones in Japanese-Japanese dictionaries, the words 'hot' and 'cold' carry common definitions. When roughly divining these four adjectives, 'hot' and 'cold' are placed on two opposing ends of the scale. This is clearly demonstrated in definitions. Further more, for these two extreme points in temperature, neither of the words conveys any positive sense. However, the adjective 'hot' in Japanese is applied differently in its Kanji use(Chinese character). Regarding the temperature of air, “暑い” is applied, while the other situations such as liquid and objects to be modified, “熱い” is applied to manifest the orientation of heat. As for 'cold,' “寒い” is for the temperature of air, and “冷たい” is for the others.

The other adjectives 'warm' and 'cool,' particularly 'cool,' not only limit the definition but also its connotation. In both languages, when these adjectives are used in the category of air, 'warm' and 'cool' convey positive sense. Likewise, 'cool' can be applied in the category of air and liquid. Especially when 'cool' is applied in the category of liquid, it conveys positive sense in English while it conveys negative in Japanese.

(1) a cool breeze blew off the sea

(1)' a cool breeze 涼風

(2) a nice cool beer

(2)' The coffee isn't cool コーヒーはさめていない。

(1) and (2) are quoted from an English-English dictionary, and (1)' and (2)' are

from an English-Japanese dictionary. As shown, in (1) and (1)', the word 'cool' is followed by the same noun 'breeze' carrying the same connotation. As for (2) and (2)', the nouns following are in the category of liquid. Being supported by the word 'nice,' 'cool' in (2) totally changes the connotation into a negative one in its translation into Japanese. When 'cool' is commonly translated into 'さめた' in Japanese, the word 'cool' needs to be replaced in 'chilly' to give a closer meaning. Since 'さめた = chilly' carries a negative sense, the denotation in the English-Japanese dictionary needs to be corrected in the translation. As defined in most of the English-English dictionaries, 'cool' has a meaning of refreshing and this entry appears also in English-Japanese dictionaries. Therefore, some well-applied example sentences need to be introduced with the supporting explanations. Although the definition in English does not enable the Japanese language to translate as simply in one adjective word for refreshing, such as 'ひゃっこい,' which is not commonly used in Japanese, the connotation needs to be conveyed by having appropriate examples borrowed from English-English dictionaries with a more precise adjective to match.

### 3. Metaphorical Aspects of 'warm,' 'hot,' 'cool,' and 'cold'

In metaphorical definitions of 'warm,' most of the dictionaries commonly introduce a pleasant feeling, friendliness, sympathy and affection. These definitions imply closely inclining human emotions both in English and Japanese.

In addition to the definition above, excitement, ardent, disagreement, fieriness, and uncomfortability are also introduced in English dictionaries. On the other hand, no arising emotional states are found in Japanese dictionaries. As shown in the physical conceptual connotation, 'warmth' in

Japanese, also forms a point of temperature, conveys a mildness and moderation in which any intense emotions cannot correspond. In terms of the emotional level, these levels are illustrated rather by 'hot' in Japanese.

Comparing 'hot' to 'warm,' more intensity of emotion is oriented in English and Japanese connotations. Various differences, and not corresponding definitions shown in 'warm,' are clearly displayed in 'hot.' Therefore, the friendliness is replaced by intimacy, and the excitement is expressed as an arousal of feeling not to be handled so easily. In respect of disagreement in English, 'hot' also implies a strong opposing feeling that can yet cause either argument or violence. Furthermore, skillfulness is added as a new entry of definition. In Japanese, 'hot' implies close relationship more than friendliness and the degree of arising emotion is expressed as enthusiasm and great eagerness without such intensity or would cause a dangerous result.

As for 'cool' in English, indifference, calmness, unexcitedness, and lack of affection are initially introduced in the dictionary entries. A sense of calmness and aloofness underlies all the definitions given. While 'cool' in English directs to various usages by its connotation, 'cool' in Japanese shares only one definition 'indifference.' However, this carries the meaning of aloofness, rather than calmness.' Moreover, 'cool' in Japanese does not convey a comfortability in temperature, particularly that of liquid, though it gives a meaning of clearliness and innocence in appearance.

(3) a cool head in crisis

(3)' 彼は人が困っているのに、すずしい顔をしている。

(=He keeps cool in someone else' crisis.)

(4) すずしい目元

(=an innocent look)

In the English 'cold,' a void of friendliness, cordiality, apathy, and

indifference, uninfluenced by feeling, are introduced as denotation. Initially, lack of emotional intensity is oriented in the connotation. As well as 'cold' in English, 'cold' in Japanese has the same definition in the denotation level. However, 'cold' in Japanese has a determining connotation in usage. In addition to lacking affection, coldness results from opposition, and is objectively influenced in acting and speaking.

#### **4. Comparing the aspects of 'warm,' 'hot,' 'cool,' and 'cold' in idiomatic expressions**

While many idiomatic expressions with the adjectives 'warm,' 'hot,' 'cool,' and 'cold' are found in English dictionaries, no expressions are found in Japanese dictionaries. This is perhaps because these adjectives are used only for modifying the word directly following in Japanese. However, examining the English expressions and their usages, similar uses and different applications of adjectives in Japanese can be found.

##### **(5) warm-hearted**

暖かい心 (の)

In English, this expression describes a characteristic of kindness, affection, friendliness, and generosity. In Japanese, this warmth can be specified for characteristics of sympathy and understanding.

##### **(6) hot on something**

〜にあつくなる

In English, this hot shows great interest on something, and because of the interest the person is well-informed about the subject. In Japanese, this expression can be used when someone has a strong, loving feeling towards another person. Regarding great interest, 熱中する is closer in meaning.

##### **(7) hot under the collar**

立腹する

In English, this expresses an anger and an excited feeling to draw oneself into an argument. In Japanese, this type of feeling was used as slang to express a similar situation among young people, ～に（対して）あつくなる.

(8) give it someone hot

お灸をすえる

In English, this expresses to scold and to discipline someone. In Japanese, this literally means to burn moxa on the skin. Moxa is a substance used for medication purpose. The expression suggests the production of heat. Both expressions imply its temporality and purpose of discipline.

(9) make it (too) hot for someone

窮地に立たせる

In English, this expresses putting someone in a difficult and unbearable position. Other expressions and compound words, such as 'get into hot water,' 'hot seat,' 'hot spot,' 'hot potato,' carry the implication of difficulty, trouble, or an unbearable situation. In Japanese, no indications of heat or hotness appear in this expression. However, the meaning of 窮（きゅう） is a dead end without escape. While the English implies a cause of having someone leave, the Japanese implies not giving someone anyway to leave. Therefore, the Japanese expression is more severe in its use.

(10) blow one's cool

lose one's cool

冷静さを失う

(11) keep one's cool

冷静を保つ

(12) play it cool

余裕ありげにふるまう

\*すずしい顔をする

These expressions above with 'cool' share the meaning of 'calmness.' Only (12) provides calmness with a self-confidence. In the Japanese expressions, as in (10) and (11), both can directly carry the meaning of 'calmness.' In (12) however, although this expression is rephrased into two different expressions, neither of the expressions carries the meaning of a self-confidence but indifference. Only in a certain context, 'すずしい顔' can show a self-confident impression. as in the example below.

(13) 彼は誰も解けなかった問題を すずしい顔で解いてみせた。

(=With a cool smile on his face, he solved the problem which no one could.)

(14) cold-hearted

冷たい心 (の)

In English, this expresses a lack of sympathy or kindness. In Japanese, this carries the same meaning in general with its direct expression.

(15) cold sweat

冷や汗

In English, this is described in more detail as simultaneous perspiration and chill induced by fear, pain, and shock. In Japanese, all of the definitions appearing in English can be found except perspiration induced by shame. Since shame is more prevalent in the mentality of the Japanese and their society- the situation of losing one's face particularly in public-here perspiration results from shame as well.

(16) cold-blooded

冷血 (の)

Both in English and Japanese, this expresses a lack of feeling mercilessness, and cruelty.

(17) give the cold shoulder



つめたい態度をとる

(18) get the cold shoulder

つれない態度を受ける

Both (17) and (18) express the intention of ignoring and rejecting someone. In English, detailed behaviors are mainly focused. In Japanese instead, as two different adjectives are applied in (17) and (18), the adjectives can change depending on whether the agent gives or receives such behavior with or without the person's intention of hurting the recipient.

(16) pour cold water on something

水を差す／かける

In English, this expresses to discourage doing something, or to reduce enthusiasm for something. In Japanese, this expresses forcing someone to split with close friends or with people in a good relationship, and criticizing something such as plans which have already been set forth or are in progress. The Japanese expressions are subjective enough to imply the underlying characteristic of coldness also with an opposing feeling.

As examined above, similar expressions can be found both in English and Japanese. Some of the expressions contain exactly the same adjective carrying the same meaning. However, some of the others contain neither the same adjectives nor the same implication. In 'warm,' generally all descriptions both in English and Japanese can be put in the same category of the goodness of 'warmth.' However, the main focus of the warmth is different. This reflects what people of each language require in 'warm' characteristics. In 'hot,' English expressions with 'hot' can be applied for objects and people. While one for objects has a positive sense, the one for people mostly expresses situations of trouble with a negative sense. In applying them to Japanese expressions, the implication of 'hotness' is expressed in a more intense and severe situation. In 'cool,' all the expres-

sions in English preserve its premise of 'calmness' in a positive way. Only when the word 'cool' is directly translated into the Japanese word, it changes the meaning of calmness into pride. In 'cold,' although the word 'cold' has a negative sense in both English and Japanese, Japanese shows a coldness on the conscious level. Therefore, the coldness in Japanese implies a far colder coldness than the 'coldness' in English expressions.

## 5. Conclusion

When a word can be relevant in translation from one language to the other, the word is likely to be applied to some other expressions in the target language carrying the definition found in the original language regardless of the context. However, this mistaken usage in expressions causes a gap since the connotation differs from one to the other. Unless adequate examples with a brief context are introduced in dictionaries, the gap remains unsolved in communication, even if adjectives examined in this paper are simply used and quite frequently taken into practice in communication ignorant of the connotations. Some examples appearing in bilingual dictionaries provide indications of underlying meanings, but the indications are not clearly demonstrated as differing in meaning from one language to the other. The different connotations of 'warm,' 'hot,' 'cool,' and 'cold' between English and Japanese are listed in the following table.

**'WARM'**

*English*

*Usage*

air, liquid, objects,  
characteristic

*Differing connotations*

(in characteristic)

friendliness, kindness  
generosity, affection

*Japanese*

*Usage*

air, liquid, objects,  
characteristic

*Differing connotations*

(in characteristic)

sympathy, understanding

**'HOT'**

*English*

*Usage*

air, liquid, objects,  
emotions

*Differing connotations*

(in emotions)

eagerness, ardent, interests  
disagreement, trouble  
situations, difficulty

*Japanese*

*Usage*

air, liquid, objects,  
emotions

*Differing connotations*

(in emotions)

intimate relationship,  
ardent

‘COOL’

*English*

*Usage*

air, liquid, objects,  
characteristic

*Differing connotations*

(in liquid)

positive, pleasant

temperature

(in characteristic)

calmness, self-confidence

*Japanese*

*Usage*

air, liquid, objects,  
characteristic

*Differing connotations*

(in liquid)

negative, unpleasant

temperature

(in characteristic)

indifference

‘COLD’

*English*

*Usage*

air, liquid, objects,  
characteristic

*Differing connotations*

(in characteristic)

mercilessness and cruelty

in behavior

*Japanese*

*Usage*

air, liquid, objects,  
characteristic

*Differing connotations*

(in characteristic)

mercilessness, hurting, and  
opposing behavior by intention  
performed either subjectively  
or objectively

As shown above, these adjectives share their usages both in English and Japanese, but not their connotations. Therefore, when these adjectives are introduced to language learners, the connotations also need to be introduced as well as their definitions and examples. In addition, language instructors

should suggest that learners pay close attention so as to be aware of the underlying meaning for the particular of words usage in connotation. This can be a great opportunity for learners to examine and evaluate differences and to see how many different words can be applied that carry the same connotations in each language.

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